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particular villages and timed their different activities (cf. Appendix, Table E).

The conditions of work in this area were particularly favourable from some points of view. The Bemba live in communities of thirty to fifty huts. These are not surrounded by any kind of enclosure and most of the cooking, eating, dancing, quarrelling, and children's play take place out of doors. Hence by placing my tent in the middle of a village, I could watch the people's activities going on around me. I never slept in a native hut but think I observed as much or more from my point of vantage. Kinship patterns and the interplay of individual character—factors that also influence economic co-operation and food distribution—stood out clearly in settlements of this size. I reckoned to spend three to six weeks in each village. The type of chieftainship—the dominant institution in this culture—necessitated my travelling rather extensively from district to district in order to complete a study of ritual and political forms. These visits to different villages from one end of the country to another were valuable from an agricultural point of view since they showed me the range of local variation in cultivation and gave me comparative material on the social and economic changes introduced into Bemba villages by European contacts of different types.[1] But a nutrition expert making a quantitative study of diet would probably have collected more valuable material by staying in one village throughout the whole year.

I worked throughout in the native language as this was essential in this particular area. I therefore had to give up a month entirely to linguistic work on my arrival, and spent at least three before I was able to question informants with any success.[2] The actual

[1] Cf. my 'Anthropological Problems in North-Eastern Rhodesia', *Africa*, 1932, vol. v, and 'The Village Census in the Study of Contact Problems', ibid., 1935, vol. viii.

Longer visits were made to villages selected from four different administrative districts, i.e. visits of one to two months in the following: Chiefs' villages—Citimukulu, Mwamba, Nkula, Candamukulu, Matipa or Cilubi Island; and commoners' villages, *Chinsali district*—Pambalasa, Kachienja, Kasaka, Kasakatula; *Mpika district*—Shilusuko; *Kasama district*—Kungu, Mubanga, Kampamba. Visits of one week to three weeks: Chiefs' villages—Makassa, Nkolemfumu, Mwaba, Lucembe, Shimwalule, and commoner's villages, *Mpika district*—Kapongolo; *Kasama district*—Cimba, Citikafula, Molema.

[2] Some grammars and vocabularies exist. W. Lammond, *A Short Grammar of Chibemba*, 1926; *Bemba–English Vocabulary*, 1926; E. B. H. Goodall, *Some Wemba Words*, 1921; P. Guillermé, *Dictionnaire Français–Chibemba*, 1920.

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avoid identifying myself with either of the three classes of Europeans referred to, and in some ways it was easier for a woman anthropologist to do so than for a man. I gradually established a role as an inquirer into native customs, with the taking of notes and photographs as my 'work', and many elderly men and women were actually interested in 'teaching' me, but I was always treated as a person in authority however little I tried to exert that power. I was referred to as 'chieftainess' or even 'chief', as are most Government officials, and finally found it best to adopt the speech patterns of the Bemba royal family when addressing commoners, and to accept as much deference as they did. This position of prestige prevented my attaining any real position of equality with the people but was an advantage in carrying out village censuses when it was helpful to be able to exert a certain amount of authority.[1]

To these preliminary statements I should add the fact that I have never lived in a European agricultural community, and it is therefore possible that some of the customs of cultivation which I describe as 'primitive' exist among peasants in this continent. I have had a general biological training but know nothing of medical and agricultural science or of ecology, and was unable at the time to get any practical co-operation from experts in these fields.

To describe a culture the anthropologist has to draw upon notes of personal observations, native texts, and concrete documentation in the form of daily records, plans, and descriptions of individual cases. It has not been possible to get a tenth of this material *into* a book of this size, and much of it cannot be summarized in statistical form. I have therefore given concrete cases here and there as illustrative material only, indicating where I could whether such incidents were common. Where I have used the phrase 'The Bemba say . . .', I mean a statement regularly made in answer to a question, or a formalized utterance in the shape of a proverb or saying. Different points of view as occurring between

[1] Cf. also M. Herskovits' use of the term 'social visibility' in relation to a white anthropologist in Africa, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 1937, pp. 322-23. My friend E. J. Lindgren has pointed out to me how important it is for the ethnologist to describe his role in a native community and has stressed the very different attitude of the Asiatic peoples of N. China to the visit of a European anthropologist from that of the Africans and Melanesians. *Congrès international des sciences anthropologiques et ethnologiques*, 1934, Section B. Cf. also O. A. Oeser's 'Methods and assumptions in field-work in Social Psychology', *B. Journal of Psychology*, 1937, vol. xxvii.

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# PART V

# THE PRODUCTION OF FOOD

## CHAPTER XIII

## LAND, AND LAND TENURE

*Introduction.*

000 THE food-supply of any territory must depend on two sets of factors—the physical properties of the environment itself, and the customs and traditional lore of the people who are trying to exploit it. It is as necessary to know the methods by which the people of a particular district produce their food, their economic motives, and the rules that govern the use of the land's resources, as it is to know the nature of the soil, its vegetation and fauna, or its general climatic conditions; and it is the former aspect which the anthropologist contributes to the study of native agriculture. I shall describe, therefore, the general attitude of the Bemba to their environment, their system of land tenure and land selection, their agricultural, hunting, and fishing activities, their seasonal calendar, their type of economic co-operation, and the religious and magic beliefs that affect their production of food.

● 123 As an anthropologist, I was of course anxious from the start to see as much as I could of the food-producing activities of the people, since for the majority of the Bemba, even at the present day, these fill the bulk of their time. Living consecutively in different types of village, I was able to watch a variety of agricultural processes. These I have tried to describe as far as possible in the natives' own terms rather than in those of modern agricultural science, since my aim was to study the Bemba's own rudimentary principles of cultivation, as these determined their food-production. With regard to the land, I was unable to classify the different types of soil, since no survey had as yet been made in the area,[1] but I considered it my function to collect the terms usually used by natives to describe the soils they cultivated, and to note their customary method of assessing the fertility of any

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[1] The ecological survey now being made in N. E. Rhodesia had not then been undertaken.

[p. 228]

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123 piece of ground or its fitness for special purposes. I studied in as many cases as possible the reasons that led them to select ground, either for village sites or for gardens, the whole complex of religious, magic, and political ideas associated with the land, and finally its system of tenure. These are the type of facts that give us the actual as distinct from the potential resources of the land.

The different agricultural methods of the Bemba are described largely in terms of native comments. The success or failure of these I did not try to assess, except through the natives' own eyes, or my own untrained observations. The average yield of different crops has been calculated, in the case of the cultivation of the neighbouring Mambwe, on experimental plots at the agricultural station at Abercorn.[1] Similar experiments are being made in Bemba country at Shiwa Ndandu. I had neither the time nor the specialist comparative knowledge to touch this aspect of the question at all. On the other hand, I considered it important to study the Bemba's own system of estimating the productivity of his gardens, whether expressed in numerical terms or not. Was he able himself to assess the yield in any particular year and to plan out his needs for a future season? To what did he attribute his failures or achievements—to errors of judgement or to the hostility of supernatural powers? In brief, I wanted to study the people's traditional objective in gardening, the methods by which they thought they could attain it, actual or ritual, the way in which they calculated their achievements, and the motives which made them work more or less hard.

It was of equal sociological interest to estimate the extent of individual variation in the ordinary agricultural practices, and to account for it, if possible, in terms of personality differences, the influence of white contact, or inequalities in general economic conditions. The primitive cultivator is often said to follow tribal tradition blindly, without choice or reason, but in actual fact when seen in his own garden he appears as a man struggling in a hard environment with a bewildering number of alternative courses of action, and there are as many grades between the fool and the wise man as in any community of our own. The conservatism of the tribal African has, I think, been exaggerated. In reality, most of the Bantu have been changing their agricultural practices in contact with the surrounding peoples for generations,

[1] Cf. W. Moffat, op. cit.

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123 and a good many experiments are actually made in the course of an individual's life. Where soil selection depends on accumulated experience, as it must do among shifting cultivators, this is especially the case, and a man could make many agricultural blunders between youth and manhood if he were acting alone. His type of education and system of co-operation in gardening prevent him from doing so to a certain extent. And it is for this reason that individual differences in agricultural skill, leadership, and the way in which economic knowledge is handed on to the next generation are facts of importance from an agricultural point of view.

The basis of the Bemba system of domestic co-operation has already been described (Chap. VIII), but it will be necessary to study the village and kinship groups as agricultural units and to estimate as far as possible the labour force required for each particular process and its relation to the cycle of other activities—political, religious, domestic, or recreational—which go to make up the daily or seasonal routine. The problem of diet in relation to the labour supply is obviously of particular importance in an area with such a large proportion of adult males away.

*General Attitude to Land.*

823 A group of Bemba walking from place to place through their tribal territory view surroundings from an entirely different standpoint from our own. Different objects excite their interest and admiration, and they comment on the scenes they pass through in different terms. This general attitude of the people towards their environment is important to describe. It expresses the line of their economic interests, and ultimately determines the legal rules by which their land is used.

823 311 Now the main aim of the Bemba cultivator is to grow as much millet as possible in any one year, and millet gardens are made by cutting off tree-tops and burning their branches. For this reason, when walking through the bush the Bemba are constantly on the watch for many and high trees. To these natives the whole stretch of land is in a sense one unit. It is all 'bush' (*mpanga*), and all potentially cultivateable. The differences between productive and unproductive soil, in their eyes, is the presence or absence of trees.

824 What the European regards as yet another stretch of monotonous bush is to the Bemba a possible garden site. Trees are the ultimate source of his food-supply. More than this, they are the means by which all the material equipment of his life is secured.

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881X 584
or out of marriage. Anyone who takes this right from him is said to steal or spoil the chisungu.

The actual ceremony I witnessed will now be described.

881X 123
The presentation of this type of ritual material raises difficulties. The chisungu ceremony I attended in 1931 lasted continuously for over a month. (I was told that in the old days the rites would have spread over six months or more.) During this time I saw over eighteen separate ceremonies in the initiation hut and surrounding bush; each of these can be split into a number of simpler ritual acts the symbolism of which was as obscure to some of the observers as it was to me. Over forty different pottery emblems were made and handled during the ceremony and a number of others have come to my notice since that date. The walls of the hut were painted with nine different designs on the occasion in question.[1] I recorded over fifty special chisungu songs during the rite and I [126] should estimate that those I was able to take down formed a little over half the total sung.

The rites include dramatic episodes which could not fail to strike the imagination of any onlooker, but these were interspersed with days and nights of incessant dancing, which were wearying even to watch. They are likely to be even more tedious to read about.

881X 128
It would, of course, be possible to make the material more readable by rigid selection, and the Bemba themselves eliminate detail in the most ruthless fashion when providing outline accounts of the chisungu to European enquirers. (See page 135.) But if an account of a series of rites is to be given at all, it must surely be complete. Omission merely reflects the anthropologist's own threshold of boredom. Puberty ritual is of interest to different types of scientists. There is, for instance, no full account of the nubility ceremonial from this area and, to the ethnologist interested in mapping out the affinities of different cultural groups of the area, the presence or absence of a particular detail of ritual may be of the utmost significance.

The psychologist studying symbolic behaviour, or the linguist interested in the ritual use of language, needs to know the whole system of symbols used if he is to draw deductions from the material. I have, therefore, given all the song and mime data I

[1] Vernon Brelsford has published line drawings of sixteen others, cf. 'Some reflections on Bemba geometric art', *Bantu Studies*, vol. XI, 1937.

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Government messengers' quarters, and some stores. The big Church of Scotland mission of Lubwa, with its teachers' training school, lay a few miles away. It was therefore a matter of some surprise to me to hear that the ceremony was to be carried out in a village so much in contact with European civilization. The reason was, I think, that the mistress of the ceremonies (*nacimbusa*), Nangoshye, was a sister of the head Government messenger and living under his protection. She was a woman of some position in the neighbourhood and reckoned herself as of royal rank although she was only a member of a junior branch of the royal clan. She had an unusual personality, great organizing power, and a sharp tongue that sent her fellows scampering to carry out her commands. She was extremely anxious to keep alive the days of her past glory and to teach and interest the girls of the neighbourhood. I estimated her age as between 50 and 60, and she had an unusually good memory. She was well known to me as she had travelled with me through the neighbourhood for a period of at least four months, and had been one of my chief informants. She was anxious that I should see a ceremony correctly carried out, and the fact that one of her paternal nieces was due to be initiated gave her a suitable opportunity to arrange this. It was also a time of great food shortage, and she realized that it would have been difficult to get sufficient beer for the ceremony unless I had been able to procure the necessary millet for her.

I think the chisungu ceremony would have been performed for this particular girl, and a companion from a neighbouring village, if I had not been there, but it would probably have taken place at a later date and on a smaller scale and possibly the scene would have been shifted to a more remote village. It is certainly true that my presence attracted more women from the surrounding village than would otherwise have attended and that an effort was made to carry out the rites as nearly according to tradition as possible. The younger women spoke of the ceremony as an unusually important one for the neighbourhood, chiefly, I think, owing to their admiration and respect for Nangoshye. The rites were, therefore, more elaborate than were usual in that area in 1931 but much less long and complex than would have been the case in pre-European days. The whole ceremony was complete in just

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*881 under a month, whereas, in the past, it would have lasted six months to a year.

Nangoshye was supported by an extremely old woman, Nacitembo, reckoned as 'father's sister' to one of the girls initiated. Her memory must have been longer than that of the *nacimbusa*, but she was no longer very articulate. Five or six other *nacimbusas* from surrounding villages attended for the most important rites. The headman of the village was himself the maternal grandfather of one of the girls to be initiated, and showed interest in the ceremony. There were only two candidates for initiation. Both had reached maturity a few months earlier; one was already betrothed to a young man who was away at the mines, but the other was not yet affianced.

*881 ● 123 In some ways conditions were favourable for observing a ceremony of this kind. I had been in the country for over a year and could speak the language fairly fluently, although I did not find it possible to follow all the archaic phraseology used in some of the ritual. I knew the *nacimbusa* personally very well. As the provider of the beer, I was described as the owner (*mwine*) of the ceremony and had the right to attend any part of it. I had a tent in the village opposite the chisungu hut and could, therefore, hear and see everything that was going on. On the other hand, it is hardly possible for one field worker to get all the relevant material in a ceremony of this kind. There is the difficulty of taking photographs and simultaneously writing notes during rites that take place in bush and village and on the road between the two. There is also the factor of exhaustion. Songs and dances often went on until two and three in the morning. On such occasions the company is usually elated by beer and accustomed to the heat of a small hut about eight feet in diameter filled with twenty or thirty people and an enormous fire. The observer is dead sober, nearly stifled, with eyes running from the smoke, and straining all the time to catch the words from the songs screeched around her, and to transcribe them by the firelight that penetrates occasionally through the mass of human limbs.

I realize, therefore, that there are many blanks in my material which were probably unavoidable. I was also obliged to leave before the follow-up of the ceremony, i.e. the actual marriage of the

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girls in question, and I had little time to get subsequent comment from other sections of the community such as the men of the village as distinct from the women, or from one or two of the Christians living in the neighbourhood. A striking gap in my material is the absence of any comments made by the girls themselves. This is, I think, significant. These girls, who are obliged to remain silent, often covered with blankets, seem to lose all personality for the observer as the rites follow one after the other. They are both the centres of the ceremony, and yet the least interesting of the actors in it. However, I consider my failure to arrange for longer conversations and more intimate contacts with the two girls to have been a serious omission. It leaves an element of uncertainty in my interpretation of the educational function of the rites.

In the following account, I try to give a straightforward description of what I actually saw and heard with comments made by informants during the ceremony or in answer to questions afterwards. I was able to check up much of the data during a visit to other areas in 1933–4, and with specialist students of Cibemba, Paul Mushindo, A. Chileshye, I. A. Nkonde and Kasonde.

Comments made to me during the course of the rites are given in brackets. Unless otherwise stated, the comments were made by any woman present. Interpretations made subsequently, either by one of the *nacimbusas* or by one of these Bemba experts are given in footnotes.[1] N.G. stands for Nangoshye, P.B.M. for Paul Mushindo and A.C. for A. Chileshye.

### FIRST DAY

*The blessing of the girls* (*ukupala amate*)

The first rite of the ceremony took place on May 31st. I was told that the headman of the village called the blessing of his ancestral spirits in the early morning. This he did by spitting into the air and calling on the names of his ancestors. I did not see this rite but it is the common Bemba practice in ceremonies of the kind.

*The entry into the hut* (*ukuingishya abanacisungu*)

At about four in the afternoon, the village drums began to go with the characteristic chisungu rhythm. I was called to the hut

[1] A free translation of songs is given. The full interpretation follows in Appendix B. The song numbers refer to this appendix.